

improve, the funding is discontinued and their test scores decline again. A current legislative proposal would change the method of allocation so that LAP funding would be distributed according to poverty data instead of test scores. This funding will also have additional accountability associated with it to ensure success.

## The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and High School graduation



Beginning in 2008, students will have to earn a Certificate of Mastery (CoM) in order to graduate from high school. The CoM is awarded to students who pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL and has transformed the assessment tool into a high stakes test. These high stakes are amplified when the student has only one opportunity to take and pass the WASL and when no alternate methods are permitted for demonstrating proficiency in meeting state standards. I am supporting legislation that will provide greater flexibility and more opportunities for students to learn and to excel by allowing multiple retakes of the WASL and by authorizing the use of alternative assessment methods.

## The Simple Majority

Local schools district levies are an important source of funding for our neighborhood schools. But, the supermajority requirement needed to pass these voter-approved taxes has hampered and hurt many communities throughout our state even when there is majority support. The House of Representatives passed a resolution that will allow Washington voters to decide if we should keep the supermajority requirement or if we should change our state constitution to permit levy passage with a simple majority of 50 % plus one.

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37th District

Legislative  
Update

Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

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Olympia, WA 98504-0600

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### Town Hall Meeting

Saturday, February 21, 2004  
10:30 am - noon

Garfield Community Center  
Multi-purpose room

2323 East Cherry Street  
Seattle, WA 98122

Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

## 37th District Legislative Update

February 2004

Dear Neighbors,

Happy New Year! I hope that you and your loved ones are beginning 2004 with good health and in high spirits.

According to the lunar calendar, the Year of the Monkey begins January 22 and portends great challenges and opportunities in the weeks ahead. Conflict is inevitable and compromise will be difficult. But, revitalization and renewed hope are on the horizon, reflecting the optimistic outlook of this lunar year's namesake. I, too, am optimistic about our future and about our ability to meet the challenges before us.

By the time you receive this report, the Legislature will have already convened for a 60-day Session scheduled to run from January 12 to March 11. The dominant challenges we face are among the thorniest to resolve and, throughout this newsletter, I will share more information about these and other issues that I plan to address during this short session.

I remain committed to my priorities of quality education, good family-wage jobs, and affordable healthcare for all. I believe these are the cornerstones of a strong and vibrant community, today and tomorrow, and I feel deeply privileged to advocate on behalf of these critical issues that touch the daily lives of everyone in our diverse 37<sup>th</sup> District. Thank you for allowing me the honor to serve you as your state representative.

As always, I welcome your comments, questions and ideas on legislation and about your state government. I am interested in learning from your experiences and in hearing what you have to say. That's why Representative Eric Pettigrew and I will be hosting a Town Hall meeting on Saturday, February 21 at the Garfield Community Center from 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon. I hope you'll come and share your thoughts with us because your active participation in our democracy helps me to better serve our District and you.

Thank you for taking the time to review this newsletter. I hope to see or hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sharon Tomiko Santos". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sharon Tomiko Santos  
State Representative

Let’s talk money: balancing the budget

We began this legislative session with a small glimmer of good news. The November 2003 revenue forecast showed a slight increase of \$65.2 million more in tax receipts than we anticipated when we adopted the 2003-2005 general operating budget. In December 2003, the Legislature took steps to save an additional \$7 million by canceling this year’s **Presidential Primary** election. The reason is straightforward: neither major party would have paid much attention to the results. Democrats are scheduling precinct caucus meetings on February 7th to begin the selection of our presidential candidate while Republicans have no contest for their nominee. It simply doesn’t make sense for Washington taxpayers to spend millions of scarce dollars on a meaningless presidential primary. The savings are realized one-time only because the presidential primary election is suspended specifically in 2004; it will be in effect for the 2008 presidential election.

While the savings and increased revenues are welcome, their value must be considered in light of the more than \$2 billion in budget cuts sustained last year. In addition, our costs have risen with higher than expected K-12 enrollments, prison populations, and General Assistance caseloads, as well as with emergency spending on fighting forest fires last summer and other mandatory expenses we’ve incurred.

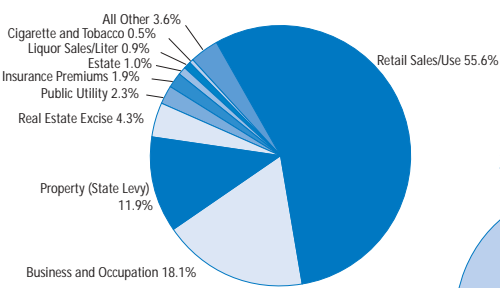
Another looming issue is whether to renew several **Research and Development (R&D) Tax Incentives** that have or are ready to expire. Re-authorization will reduce state revenue by \$59 million for the rest of this biennium and will eliminate \$190 million during the 2005-07 biennium. These measures, adopted in 1994, were intended to spur economic development by attracting high-technology and biotechnology businesses to our state and, thus, to create well-paying jobs for highly skilled workers.

The question is whether or not these tax breaks did, in fact, result in benefits to Washington. Although some studies seem to indicate that business investments in our state expanded during the period when the R & D tax credits were available, the Department of Revenue is not able to provide lawmakers or the public with data that enables us to unequivocally determine whether Washington is getting the most “bang for our public buck.”

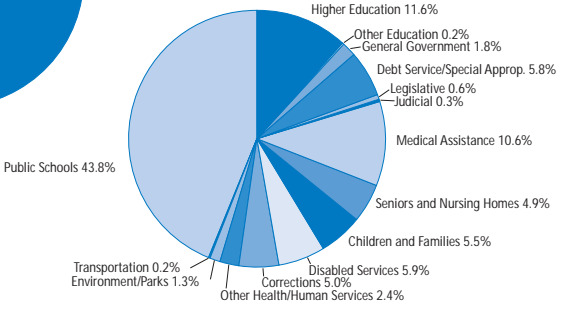
This is why I have introduced a trio of revenue bills that will:

- Promote **corporate Accountability** by requiring companies that are exempted from paying state taxes to provide sufficient data about the dollar value of their tax exemptions, the type and number of local jobs created by the company, how much these jobs pay, and other information to aid in the assessment of this tax exemption program;
- Promote **government Accountability** by requiring the Governor to prepare a tax expenditure report that shows how much revenue is not collected as a result of business tax exemptions. This report would be submitted to the Legislature with the Governor’s proposed budget; and
- Limit the revenue loss to the state by establishing a **Tax Expenditure cap**.

Where the money comes from 2003-05 Biennium Revenues



Where the money goes 2003-05 WA State Operating Budget



With the new revenue forecast and adjustments in spending for increased caseloads, many worthy legislative proposals are under review for funding consideration this session. One chief example is the ratification and funding of the **Home Healthcare Workers** contract which will provide a small hourly raise (\$.50 per hour) and some limited benefits to the men and women who care for the developmentally disabled, the medically fragile, and the elderly of our communities. The estimated cost of investing in these critical jobs is \$25 million. Other worthy proposals would restore funding that was cut from the Basic Health Plan last year and would reduce the premiums for health insurance for children in poverty.

Health care for all, not just a few

I believe healthcare is a human right and I am outraged that people who work hard and play by the rules can’t afford health insurance or medicines for their families. I am committed to improving the availability and accessibility of quality healthcare options for all. This is why I support the restoration of funding for the **Basic Health Plan** and measures to reduce healthcare premiums for children.



Patient safety

Doctors have voiced deep concerns about the continued availability of health care. Some are quitting or moving their practice because the cost of malpractice insurance, especially for high-risk practices, has astronomically increased.

We should learn from other states and not repeat their mistakes. Places like California tried to solve this problem by limiting a person’s right to a jury trial and/or establishing limits on non-economic damage awards to patients harmed by their doctors. It hasn’t worked; doctors are actually paying more in states that passed this so-called reform.

Only a small percentage of bad doctors are actually involved in the majority of malpractice lawsuits. There’s no reason your good family doctor, who’s never been sued, should pay the high costs caused by the negligence of a few.

A better solution is to attack the problem by preventing the medical errors that lead to malpractice suits. Today, rules prevent hospitals from sharing information about medical errors that lead to patient injuries or death. To save lives, those rules need to change.

To invoke some common folk wisdom, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”



Education: a smart investment

Education continues to be one of my highest priorities. Washington students deserve the best education we can provide so that they can enjoy the best advantages in life. By investing in education today, we will ensure productive communities and a healthy economy for many years to come. But it takes a lot of work and money to create world-class public schools in Washington State.



Over the past ten years of education reform, schools statewide have shown much progress, but there’s still a long way to go. We must focus our attention on addressing the complex issues that face our state - eliminating the achievement gap among students of color and for students who qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program; ensuring that all students are able to meet grade-appropriate essential academic learning requirements; and providing a public school funding system that is ample, stable, equitable, and accountable.

The Learning Assistance Program (LAP)

The Learning Assistance Program was created to assist underachieving students who need additional support in reading, mathematics, writing, or in the readiness skills associated with those subjects. Currently, additional funding is provided to schools with low test scores. When their test scores